activation and deactivation to the set of gaming machines included in a group gaming mode, as further described with respect to FIG. **5**.

[0043] Referring again to gaming module **202**, a module digest is typically including a content GUID (global unique identifier), game and version information, and data needed to validate the game module at installation and startup.

[0044] Referring to FIG. **3** and FIG. **4**, the process functionality is controlled by the system processor by executing program code, executable by a gaming machine or gaming network processor, to accomplish the functionality as described herein. It should be understood that this is only one example embodiment, and other versions may divide the processing tasks of the game method in a different manner. For example, some systems may employ a thin client architecture in which practically all of the processing tasks are performed at the game server, and only display information for the player interface transmitted to the electronic gaming machine. In such an embodiment, only the steps involving player input or display are performed by the electronic gaming machine, with the remaining steps performed by one of the game servers in the system. In such a case, though, the software architecture is preferably designed as a thin client in which a dedicated virtual machine running on the game server (or a virtual machine server connected in the gaming network) performs the tasks designated in the present drawing as occurring "at the gaming machine." In the depicted flowcharts, the method is performed by the respective computer hardware operating under control of computer program code. While central processor arrangements may vary (for example award controllers may be integrated on the same machine with a gaming server, or may be a separate server connected on a secure network), the particular central determinant architecture is not limiting and will be referred to generally in this drawing as the game server (**403**). To perform the base game and group gaming mode of FIG. **3**, the thin client version of the process, performed at the game server, further includes receiving game play requests originating from electronic gaming machine, and sending commands to the gaming machine to show reels spinning, the graphical accumulation object, the bonus round selection process, and results being displayed. The division of game logic steps between gaming machines and servers is known in the art and may be accomplished according to suitable methods allowed for the relevant gaming jurisdictions.

[0045] FIG. **5** is a flow diagram of a process for operating a group gaming mode messaging service plugin like plugin **203** of FIG. **4**. The process begins at block **500** where the group gaming mode messaging service plugin is started. At block **502**, the process maintains the individual play mode at the group of gaming machines such as the EGM's **100** in FIG. **8**. While four gaming machines are shown in this group, a messaging service may manage many more gaming machines in a group, and may manage multiple groups. Alternately, a separate instance of the messaging service may execute for each group of gaming machines configured for group mode play.

[0046] At block **504**, the process determines the current set of EGMs that will participate in a group gaming mode. In some embodiments, all EGMs in the group will participate in every group mode. In other embodiments, an active player credit account at a gaming machine qualifies it for the group gaming mode. In still others, a particular wagering level such as a number of lines bet or a special side wager may qualify the gaming machines to participate in the mode. To make this determination, the process may send and receive messages to the gaming machines indicating the status of credit accounts at the gaming machines and the wagering level currently set at the gaming machine. While blocks **502** and **504** are depicted in a particular order, typically block **504** updates the currently qualifying set of gaming machines on an event driven basis responsive to changes in the wagering level at the gaming machine.

[0047] At block **506**, the process checks whether a group mode activation occurs. Again, this step is typically event driven. In this embodiment, a timer provides a group gaming mode activation at designated times. These times may be periodic, or at randomized offsets from a designated period of time. Other embodiments may use a characteristic from the gaming machines, such as cumulative amount wagered at the qualifying gaming machines, to activate a group gaming mode. Still other embodiments may make a random determination to start a group gaming mode. If no group gaming mode activation occurs, the process maintains the individual game mode at block **502**. If a group gaming mode activation occurs, the process goes to block **508**.

[0048] To start a group gaming mode at block **508**, process transmits messages to all EGM's in the set, the qualifying gaming machines, to begin a group gaming mode. Typically the EGM's finish any primary game presentation that is in process when the message is received before changing their mode, however in some embodiments the secondary display may indicate a group gaming mode is starting while a primary game presentation is finishing. Generally primary game rounds that participate in the group gaming mode are those with a wager activation after the group gaming mode has begun at the participating gaming machines.

[0049] After activating the group gaming mode, the process at block **510** where it maintains the group game board by receiving messages from the messaging plugins at the participating gaming machines that prize objects have been awarded. These messages typically include an identifier for the prize object that was awarded and may include a credit amount and a timestamp of the award time. To maintain the group game board across the set of gaming machines, the process at block **512** transmits a message to all of the other EGM's in the set (besides the machine at which the prize object was awarded) indicating that a prize object has been taken. This triggers the gaming machines to remove the prize object from their group game board and display an indication that it has been taken. In this manner, the group game board at secondary display area **48** is maintained identically across all participating gaming machines. As the group gaming mode progresses, the prize objects **72** gradually disappear from the group game board as they are awarded at a particular gaming machine.

[0050] At block **514** the process determines whether to end the group gaming mode. In this embodiment, the determination is made based on a set time period expiring for the group gaming mode. This feature encourages player wagering in the group gaming mode because it appears as if prizes objects will be "left on the table" if they are not all awarded before the group gaming mode expires. In other embodiments, the decision to end the group gaming mode may be made based on other factors. For example, the group